

La Paz Report Confirms Death of 'Che' Guevara

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Ernesto "Che" Guevara has been killed by the Bolivian Army, it was announced today in La Paz.

The death of Fidel Castro's longtime guerrilla leader was reported to officials in La Paz late yesterday by Col. Joaquin Zenteno Anaya, commander of the Bolivian Army's 8th Division.

Zenteno said the body of one of seven guerrillas shot and killed in a battle Sunday has been identified as that of Guevara.

The army chief of staff, Col. Marcos Vasquez Sempertegui, said, "Official reports from Vallegrande affirm Guevara was killed and that his body is now with the Bolivian army." But he said this was not conclusive proof.

An armed forces communique from La Paz confirmed today Guevara has been killed by U.S.-trained Bolivian army forces. It said six other guer-

rillas were slain with him. Of the seven, three were Cubans, one a Bolivian and two were unidentified.

The battle was in mountainous country near Higueras, about 300 miles southeast of La Paz. The guerrillas' bodies were taken to Vallegrande.

Gen. Alfredo Ovando Candia, chief of the Bolivian armed forces, left the Bolivian capital last night for Vallegrande to check the report. The Army invited reporters to fly to Vallegrande today, presumably to view the body.

Two Bolivian newsmen were quoted this morning in Vallegrande as saying they had "no doubt" the corpse was that of Guevara. There was no indication on what they based their identification.

The newsmen said they had seen the body in the morgue and that it bore bullet wounds in the throat and body, and that although they were "positive" the body was that of Guevara, he appeared to have lost weight since his last pictures. Guevara reportedly had been suffering from both asthma and arthritis.

Officials here said they were awaiting positive identification — comparing fingerprints with the known prints of Guevara.

There have been a number of recent reports that Guevara was dead, but U.S. officials put a lot more stock in yesterday's. Part of their reasoning is that the Bolivians have learned a lot about the guerrilla force, and that Bolivia would suffer a major propaganda setback if the death report is later proved false.

Guevara, a 39-year-old Argentine, disappeared about two years ago. His death could be a major blow to Castro-style guerrillas throughout Latin America.

The Battle

The guerrilla casualties occurred during a four-hour fire fight with Bolivian soldiers Sunday about four miles northwest of Higueras, in the general area of Camiri, where the insurgents were first discovered last spring.

One Bolivian military source said Guevara was mortally wounded in the battle and talked with his captors before he died.

First word that Guevara may have met a violent end began to seep out of the Bolivian capital yesterday morning when President Rene Barrientos held a background meeting with news-

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men. At this session, Barrientos revealed first details of the encounter and mentioned the possibility that Guevara might have been captured or slain.

Later in the day, Gen. Ovando strengthened the report, telling reporters, "the Reds lost five men among whom, presumably, is Ernesto Che Guevara ... I hope to God it's true."

Before leaving La Paz for the scene last night, Ovando said the Army is on the track of a second guerrilla group which tried to be a decoy to pull government troops away from the unit presumably led by Guevara. It was Ovando who announced on Sept. 24 that the 4th and 8th Army Divisions were closing in on the guerrilla group led by Comandante Ramon, the pseudonym Guevara was reported using in Bolivia.

Bolivian Foreign Minister Walter Guevara Arze, at a meeting of the Organization of American States here last month, released a group of photographs, documents and fingerprints which he said had been found in caves used by the guerrillas near Camiri and established Guevara's presence among them.

It was generally believed that Guevara was dead, perhaps as a result of a dispute with Castro, when he first vanished in Havana in mid-1965. Subsequently, he was reported in a score of countries but no non-Communist nation had any certain knowledge of his whereabouts.